

## **Rangeland Resources Committee**

**8:00 am**

**Wednesday May 15<sup>th</sup>, 2019**

**Big Timber Carnegie Library-basement meeting room**

**314 McLeod St., Big Timber, MT**

Present Steve Hedstrom, John Hollenback, Diane Ahlgren, Connie Iversen, Noel Keogh, Rachel Frost- MRCDC, Stacey Barta- Rangeland Resource Program Coordinator and Jeff Mosely-MSU Extension Range Specialist.

Meeting called to order at 8 am.

Minutes were reviewed, Noel noted a correction, Steve motioned to approve the corrected September minutes, Steve 2<sup>nd</sup>, mc.

**Montana Rangelands Partnership-** The committee expressed having this item discussed at the next face to face meeting. Stacey introduced Jeff Mosley and Rachel Frost to aid in the discussion as to the premise behind the MRP and the purpose and need for this type of collaborative effort on rangelands in Montana.

**Section 8 MOU-**Stacey introduced Jeff to give RRC a brief history and background as to the purpose of the Section 8 process and the need for an updated MOU and process. Section 8 of the Public Rangelands Improvement Act of 1978 (Public Law 95-514) allows for *consultation, cooperation and coordination* in the development and execution of allotment management plans for grazing permits from both the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). Jeff also explained the process in Montana as outlined in the attachment of the MOU. The group then discussed how this could be promoted in Montana so that agency and permittees are aware of the MOU and the process. Each committee member could talk about it at conservation district meetings and other boards and committees they serve on if appropriate. Stacey mentioned her and Jeff speaking about it at MSGA, and Wool Growers mid-year and annual meetings.

**Range Tech program update-** Stacey updated everyone on the Range Technicians Program. The program will run out of funding at the end of the year. The plan is to finish up this seasons' monitoring and help landowners transition into other options. Casey has taken the job of Missouri River Conservation Districts Council coordinator but will try and wrap up her landowners before coming on Board full time with MRCDC.

**Intern Program-** Stacey gave an update on the Working Lands Intern Program. She has been to all but 1 of the 9 new host ranches and met with each of interns. She hopes to have the schedule out by Friday. This program has received many compliments from all involved. Stacey hopes this can become a regular part of the Rangeland Resources Program.

Range Camp-Stacey updated everyone on the 2019 Range camp hosted by Gallatin CD at the Hyalite Lions Club Youth Camp June 25-28.

Rotunda 2021-This event was well attended this year, and those members from RRC in attendance were introduced in Senate Chambers. Stacey proposed an event like Winter Grazing Seminar to be a part of Rotunda day. The committee thought this suggestion was a good idea. A few in attendance suggested trying to get the capital schedule in January, or as early as possible.

Range Forum 2020- Group discussed Range Forum as a great opportunity to roll out the Montana Rangelands Partnership collaborative effort. It was agreed to keep the event in Billings for now. Potential topics may include brucellosis, DSA expansion implications, grizzly bear issues.

Annual meeting for RRC and Advisory & Range Tour- Stacey gave the committee an update on the Range Tour, co-hosted by Upper Musselshell and Yellowstone CD's. A final agenda should be ready and out by June 15<sup>th</sup>. It was suggested that at Range Tour we have an "Annual" Rangeland Resources Committee meeting and bring in a speaker or ask an advisory committee member who has not been at a meeting in a while to speak on topic, Noel motioned to do this at the Range Tour this September, Diane 2<sup>nd</sup>, MC.

Yellowstone Science exchange involvement discussion- this was an idea to bring diverse groups together to share the science recently published on the Northern Range of Yellowstone. Stacey had visited with Jess Peterson and Clayton Marlow, from the Society for Range Management about a science symposium. After much discussions the RRC decided that the science symposium was important, but the timing is off and working on a future event may be possible. Noel moved to table the discussion until a later date due to important and contentious issues like bison and brucellosis, Connie 2<sup>nd</sup>, mc.

Leopold Award involvement and process- Stacey updated the Committee on the Leopold Award. Mark Nechodom with MDA abruptly retired in early May. This left Stacey holding the bag, so to speak. Stacey has engaged the steering committee and is moving forward. A press release on Earth Day from the Governor's office and Sand County announcing the award. Applications are due July 1<sup>st</sup>. The draft timeline is to announce the top 3 applicants at Range Tour, and announce the winner in spring of 2020, this could coincide with a call for applications for the next round as well.

RILP update- The committee was given a financial update of the loan program. No new loans to date. There was discussion about the loan program and why no one is participating. Stacey mentioned that when the loan program was last active was mostly prior to NECS conservation practice payments increase. The last 10-15 years programs like EQIP have had incentive payments that were high enough so that a producer is less likely to need a loan to complete a range improvement. Many other programs have become available from other agencies and groups to also help offset the costs associated with improvement practice. Stacey plans on digging into the language of the statute for the loan program and proposing alternatives to current program. Committee also tossed around the idea of the loan program being an alternative to those producers who didn't fit into an NRCS TIPS project as a means of completing smaller conservation practices.

Strategic Plan -Stacey updated the committee with thoughts and timing of when a new plan should be received and approved by the RRC. Ideally the RRC should approve and recommend a bi-annual work plan the fall before the legislative session. This allows for any budget requests to be in to DNRC in September. The Strategic plan should support the bi-annual work plan. Stacey will work on having the strategic plan and work plan updated by RRC annual meeting in September.

MSGOT- Diane reported MSGOT has 6 projects up for approval in September 2 of which 3 are term leases.

GLCI- John gave an update about GLCI. They had their annual face to face meeting in March. They are working on a strategic plan and some changes. GLCI is supporting the Leopold award.

BLM- see attached report from Floyd Thompson.

USFS- see attached report from Shawn Hienert.

MSU- Jeff Mosley gave an update on the MSU Range Extension program as well as updated the committee on some new hire to MSU. Carla Sanford has been hired as the new extension beef specialist. She comes from Georgia and is excited to be in Montana. THE RRC thanked Jeff for coming to the meeting and appreciated his input.

Noel gave update on Montana Range Days being held in Dillon for 2019 & 2020.

New Items- none

Meeting Adjourned at 12:45 pm

#### Acronyms Defined

RRC- Rangeland Resources Committee

GLCI-Grazing Lands Conservation Initiative

MSGOT-Montana Sage Grouse Oversight Team

MACD-Montana Association of Conservation Districts

BLM- Bureau of Land Management

MDA- Montana Department of Agriculture

FWP-Fish, Wildlife and Parks

MRCDC- Missouri River Conservation Districts Council

SWCDM-Soil & Water Conservation Districts of Montana

NRCS-Natural Resource Conservation Service

DNRC- Department of Natural Resources & Conservation

DRAFT